Growing a Garden and a Community

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This publication was developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist in the planning and development of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The guides in this series offer "how to" information on starting a center, creating programs and identifying center partners, marketing and media outreach, sustainability, funding, and much more.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based program established by HUD in 1995. Since then, more than 1,000 centers have opened throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These community learning centers provide residents of HUD insured and assisted properties with programs, activities and training promoting economic self-sufficiency.

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To receive copies of this publication or any others in the series, contact:

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All publications are available from the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*

Growing a Garden and a Community

Introduction

Opportunities abound for apartment residents to take a more hands-on role in improving their communities. Through community involvement, residents can get to know their neighbors better and participate in positive community-building activities. Across the United States, community involvement is on the rise. Residents are taking charge and making their neighborhoods safer, improving services, generating new income, and creating beautiful surroundings.

Community involvement activities typically fall into four categories.

Beautification

- Community gardening.
- Park and neighborhood cleanup days.
- Home and school rehabilitation programs.

Supporting Youth Activities

- Youth outings and Teen Nights.
- Mentoring and tutoring programs.

Public Safety

- Community policing.
- Neighborhood Watch.
- Senior patrols.
- Antidrug and antiviolence programs.

Community Building and Empowerment

- Community events.
- Voter registration drives.
- Participation in Parent Teacher Association or other community organizations.

This guide describes community gardening at a HUD assisted housing development in Seattle, Washington. It is one of about 10,000 community gardens operating nationwide[1] and an excellent model for Neighborhood Networks centers. It also includes brief descriptions of community garden programs in Greeley, Colorado, and Portland, Oregon.

Community gardens may range in size from 100 square feet to several acres and may serve anywhere from a single gardener to more than 50. Some community gardens are designed for special populations, such as youths or seniors. Most gardens are used for growing vegetables, but others cultivate flowers or herbs. Some community gardens generate income and are considered urban agriculture.

- Chapter 1 offers tips for Neighborhood Networks centers and other organizations that may be interested in starting a community garden. It also outlines some of the barriers that sponsors may confront.

- Chapter 2 describes the Seattle project and its impact on residents, as well as similar programs in Colorado and Oregon.

- Chapter 3 highlights resources available to help launch a community garden. Neighborhood Networks centers can adapt this information as they build their own programs.

Chapter 1. Getting Started

The steps to develop a community garden are sequential, but garden sponsors may need to take them in a different order depending on circumstances in their community. This information was excerpted from the American Community Gardening Association at *www.communitygarden.org/pubs/starting.htm.*

1. Determine Need and Interest

Sponsors should survey residents and neighbors to determine if there is enough interest in community gardening. Experts say 10 committed gardeners is the minimum to begin an effort. Determine if the garden will be open to all or target specific users, such as seniors, youth, recent immigrants, or disabled people.

2. Organize the Planning Process

Organize a group to plan the outreach and develop the garden. Establish leadership and responsibilities. A few committed participants will be needed to ensure follow through. Use committees for detailed work.

3. Identify Potential Partners

Find contributors for the site, topsoil, seeds, tools, fencing, and technical assistance. Churches and city departments of parks and recreation or community development are common sources of assistance. Several foundations provide funds for local projects. Existing gardening groups in the community can be helpful for models, advocacy, technical assistance, or partnerships. These groups might be garden clubs or groups already operating community gardens.

4. Select an Appropriate Site

Find an available site that meets your needs and does not have major environmental or incompatible use problems. The slope of the land should be limited or suitable for terracing. The site should receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight daily. Test it in the fall for contaminants and nutrients. Water should be in place or easily accessible. Secure a lease or agreement for a minimum of 3 years.

5. Prepare a Site Development Plan

Gather resources and materials. Create a tool storage space. Determine the plot sizes, access points, and fencing system. Schedule and organize a community workday. Establish work crews and schedule site cleanup and preparation.

6. Establish an Organization

Determine membership rules and responsibilities. Set dues and fees. Establish a decisionmaking process with assigned roles. Prepare a set of written rules and preferences on assignment of plots. Decide how income will be budgeted and spent and how rules will be enforced. Establish a periodic maintenance schedule.

7. Define Leadership

Develop an ongoing organizational structure with clearly defined leadership and program guidelines to limit potential disputes and misunderstandings. It may be useful to have a nongardener or other neutral person make controversial decisions. Decide if the organization should obtain nonprofit status.

8. Manage the Garden

All members should be given a set of written rules; these should also be posted at the site. Rules should cover actions to be taken if a gardener is not actively using his or her plot. The process for taking back a plot should be communicated to all gardeners. Rules should clearly define and discuss the appropriate use of pesticides and fertilizer. If gardeners are expected to donate time to maintain or improve the site, this should be clearly communicated to all participants before spring. Strict attendance, or arrangements for substitutes, should be required at community cleanups and for periodic maintenance.

9. Encourage Community Acceptance

It may be wise to host a grand opening event in the neighborhood or at the site to draw attention to the community garden. The site's appearance is important. A perimeter of flowers will enhance the visual impact and may increase the neighborhood's acceptance of the project.

Consider how to respond to or prevent vandalism and theft. One garden program set aside a "vandal's plot," posting signs that encouraged visitors to refrain from taking produce from individual plots but suggesting that if they must take something, take it from the identified communal plot. Pick ripe vegetables and fruit regularly. This will reduce theft. Find a way to involve neighborhood youths in the project. They are more likely to respect the property if they understand its importance or play a part in its development.

10. Barriers to a Community Garden

There are barriers that need to be considered during the planning process to determine if a community gardening project should proceed. Not every available piece of land is suitable or appropriate for use as a garden. Sites should be carefully considered before initiating work.

Major barriers include:

- Unsuitable land due to soil contamination.
- Unavailable land.
- Insufficient number of people interested in the project.
- Neighborhood opposition.
- Inaccessible water.

11. Budgeting for a Typical Garden Project

Community gardens are not created without expense. The initial costs of developing a site can run into thousands of dollars. Ongoing maintenance costs, by contrast, are modest. Before undertaking a garden project, residents and property managers should have a clear idea of funding and labor sources. Donations of money, materials, and volunteer labor will significantly reduce actual cash expenses.

Development costs may include site acquisition; labor and materials, such as fencing, a sod cutter, and a cultivator; irrigation; compost and bin; tools, such as a wheelbarrow, shovels, rakes, hoes, and so on); and soil testing.

Annual costs may include fertilizer, seeds, water, and coordination and troubleshooting.

Chapter 2. Blossoming Gardens

Rainier Vista Neighborhood Community Gardens (Seattle, Washington)

An innovative partnership in Seattle has transformed underused land at the Rainier Vista Apartments into highly productive vegetable gardens. In the process, the initiative has enabled residents to strengthen relationships with the surrounding community, learn gardening skills, grow nutritious and inexpensive food for their families, and for some, earn up to $4,000 a year from vegetable sales.

Partners in the project are the Rainier Vista Apartments, the city of Seattle, the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), and Friends of P-Patch, a nonprofit organization. The partners launched two gardening projects at the 482-unit Rainier Vista complex. One initiative, a community garden, has 12 small individual plots assigned to residents. The other, larger, site, which is a community-supported agriculture project, generates income for its gardeners from the sale of produce. The two projects demonstrate the breadth of community gardening activities and the importance of partnerships in their success.

Rainier Vista Apartments is a 50-year-old garden-style apartment complex operated by SHA under a contract with HUD. Long known as a trouble spot by the Seattle Police Department because of high rates of gang, drug, and crime activity, the community recently has made major strides toward stability.

A vegetable garden had been successfully operating at Rainier Vista since 1991. In 1995, seeking to build on this experience, SHA and residents approached the city. They suggested that more garden sites could be an excellent vehicle for building relationships among the isolated ethnic groups at Rainier Vista. (Many residents had only recently immigrated from Cambodia, Vietnam, and East Africa.)

Friends of P-Patch joined SHA to add three more gardens from 1995–97. A fourth was completed in 1998.

With help from residents, SHA began by identifying two suitable garden sites within the Rainier Vista complex. Staff at the city's Cultivating Communities Program then wrote a grant application, which was submitted by the Rainier Vista resident council. The city's Department of Neighborhoods used its Matching Funds Program and Community Development Block Grant to support site development. The Cultivating Communities Program provided technical assistance to resident groups and prospective gardeners.

Others also pitched in. The King Conservation District contributed long hours in assisting the project. At Rainier Vista, 25 residents volunteered to develop the gardens by spreading topsoil, building garden beds, and constructing fencing to prevent animals from destroying crops. Forty volunteers from throughout Seattle came to Rainier Vista on Earth Day in 1997 and in 1998 to assist. The Student Conservation Corps also worked on site development.

One Rainier Vista resident was a sparkplug in involving at-risk youth in the project. Convinced of the merits of such an effort, the Seattle Cultivating Communities Program hired a part-time staff person to guide 14 youth residents as they built a storage box for garden tools, created a natural drainage system around the site, and undertook other tasks. The youth, representing diverse ethnic backgrounds, gained valuable leadership skills.

Sponsors had hoped to prepare the first of two new sites for planting by March 1997, but difficulties in getting supplies delayed the planting. Unwilling to wait for the irrigation system to be installed, the gardeners began planting in June. By mid-July, they harvested the first vegetables. Today, 12 resident gardeners grow produce on assigned plots in this garden.

More garden developments followed. By 1998 Rainier Vista residents were cultivating 50 individual garden plots, averaging 120 square feet, on the garden's four sites. A fifth site opened in 1999, supplying fresh vegetables for children's lunches at the Rainier Vista Child Care Center. Parents of children enrolled at the center help maintain the garden.

A walk through the Rainier Vista community gardens reveals safe and well-maintained access areas, and animal fencing surrounds the gardens. New mini-parks with benches, developed as part of the garden project, dot the area. Toolboxes storing garden tools remain unlocked.

Community-Supported Agriculture

Rainier Vista began its Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) project in 1997 with the help of the city's Cultivating Communities Program. Unlike the smaller community gardens, CSAs are intensely cultivated, urban minifarms, designed to enable gardeners to sell produce for a profit.

The Rainier Vista Sunrise Garden was created from a long strip of unused SHA land located behind the complex. Residents and volunteers doubled the size of the plot to 1.5 acres. Twenty-four neighboring families in southeast Seattle pay $350 per year to take the harvested produce. Every Saturday for 6 months, these subscribing families come to the gardens to pick up shopping bags brimming with fresh vegetables. The harvest is often more than these families can consume so they share with others.

Rainier Vista Community Gardens: Key Partners and Their Roles

- **Friends of P-Patch:** This nonprofit volunteer group provides fiscal management and raises funds for the program.
- **Residents:** Rainier Vista residents contribute time and energy to prepare garden plots and serve as gardeners and merchants.
- **Seattle Housing Authority (SHA):** SHA provides land for the gardens. The agency also contributes topsoil, fencing materials, seeds, and water.
- **City of Seattle:** City staff operate the Cultivating Communities Program on sites owned by SHA. They provide an organizational framework, technical assistance to start garden groups, and capital for startup gardens.
- **Southeast District Neighbors:** Neighbors buy produce from the gardener/merchants.
- **Community Organizations:** Several nonprofit organizations contribute to specific projects in the Cultivating Communities Program. Resident councils at the apartment complex play important roles in fundraising and sponsorship. The King Conservation District and the Student Conservation Corps contribute volunteers and technical assistance for developing garden sites.
- **Local Foundations:** Local private foundations donate funds to support the gardens.
- **Businesses:** Local businesses make in-kind contributions of materials and supplies.

An interpreter facilitates communication between the gardeners and their customers. For many recent immigrants, this is their first interaction with people outside their own culture. Extra produce is sold at the Columbia City Neighborhood Market, located five blocks from Rainier Vista. In addition to growing enough food for their own families and relatives, the gardeners earn supplemental income. In 1998 each gardener/merchant earned between $2,000 and $4,000.

Elsewhere in Seattle, another CSA project, Holly Park Most Abundant Garden, was developed in 1997 on a 1/8-acre site at Holly Park Apartments, located 2 miles south of Rainier Vista. The site had been a deteriorated basketball court. Residents volunteered to break up the concrete and create an urban mini-farm, which then doubled in size in 1998. Friends of P-Patch manage the program with oversight from the Holly Park Community Council. Twelve gardeners, all recent immigrants till the soil. These CSA plots, much smaller than those at Rainier Vista, generate an average of $350 a year for each gardener from sales to 19 subscribing families.

Special Challenges

The Rainier Vista community gardens addressed two major problems. First, the surrounding neighborhood perceived the complex as a primary source of crime and drug dealing. Many residents rarely left their homes. A concerted effort by the Seattle police, augmented by new social services and changes in SHA policies, succeeded in reducing crime at Rainier Vista. But the isolation of residents and the negative perception of the community remained major concerns of SHA staff.

A second persistent challenge at the complex was how to foster economic self-sufficiency among Rainier Vista residents. The garden project became one solution because it provided supplemental income to some gardeners or reduced their food costs.

> "Community involvement in the design and construction of the gardens gave the residents a stake in a common community goal."
>
> Josh Monahan,
> King Conservation District Coordinator

Results

- **Community building.** The Rainier Vista gardens fostered a strong sense of community. Once-isolated residents now help each other with childcare and step in when someone is sick. Resident contact with the surrounding neighborhood has increased as gardener/merchants sell their produce to people living outside the apartment complex.

- **Neighborhood beautification.** Many residents have begun to take pride in greening their neighborhood. Other beautification projects have sprung up around the gardens, including flower plantings that screen the garden fences and new sitting areas.

- **Education.** Participants learned about recycling and developing organic food sources. Gardeners used compost, bark, and other natural materials at the sites.

- **Intergenerational activity.** Adults included their children when preparing and maintaining their garden plots.

- **Improved diets.** Diets have improved because of the availability of fresh produce.

- **Cost savings.** All gardeners have reduced their grocery bills.

- **Increased income.** CSA gardeners earn significant income.

> "The Community-Supported Agriculture projects bring middle-income persons into low-income areas of the neighborhood. Many of these people would not otherwise have ventured into the area. It helps remove some of the myths people have had about low-income areas. This community-building process also enriches the lives of residents who have had only limited contact with middle-income persons. When our consumer families make telephone calls to our gardener/merchants to find out how their sick child is doing, we know we are breaking down barriers."
>
> Martha Goodlett,
> Seattle P-Patch Program Coordinator

For further information on Seattle's Cultivating Communities Program, contact:

Martha Goodlett
Friends of P-Patch
700 Third Avenue, Fourth Floor
Seattle, WA 98104–1848
Phone: (206) 978–6372
E-mail: martha.goodlett@ci.seatttle.wa.us

Island Grove Neighborhood Network, Island Grove Village Apartments (Greeley, Colorado)

In 1992 residents of this 108-unit complex approached a nonprofit organization that owned property 5 blocks away from the apartments. The property, donated by an environmentally conscious individual, was designated as a nature center. Residents asked to use two 25 x 100 foot plots. In return, the residents promised to improve the property and use it as a community garden. The property management firm budgets approximately $100 per year to buy materials. Every spring, the Neighborhood Networks services coordinator organizes 15 to 25 volunteers who maintain the garden. Nonprofit organizations in the community provide additional help.

A popular crop is chili peppers. Squash, beans, and other vegetables also provide residents with fresh produce. Another major benefit, the property manager says, is a greater involvement of residents in community activities. For more information, contact:

Richard Maxfield, President
Maxfield Services Corporation
810 Eighth Street
Greeley, CO 80631
Phone: (970) 352–6661
E-mail: rmaxf@info2000.net
Web site: *www.islandgrove.org*

Westmoreland Union Manor (Portland, Oregon)

Three senior residential properties under a single property manager have a long history of garden projects managed by residents. Kirkland Union Manor III (320 units), Marshall Union Manor (250 units), and Westmoreland Union Manor (350 units), each set aside sites for garden plots. The gardens have proven very popular, there is a waiting list for residents to obtain plots. The Westmoreland garden has been in continuous operation for 20 years. Each site has 25 to 30 individual plots where tenants grow vegetables or flowers. Some are shared plots. About 100 residents participate. Resident garden committees work with the property manager to develop rules. The committees also raise funds for tools and have purchased a tool shed for use at Westmoreland. Each spring, the property management firm turns the soil before planting begins. Residents are then responsible for planting, watering, and maintaining their own spaces. A unique feature of the garden at Westmoreland Union Manor is that nine of the plots have raised garden beds for accessibility by residents in wheelchairs. For more information, contact:

Cyndy Hafterson
Resident Services Coordinator
Kirkland Union Manor III
3530 Southeast 84th Street
Portland, OR 97266
Phone: (503) 788–0882
E-mail: chafterson@worldnet.att.net

Chapter 3. Resources for Developing Community Gardens

A number of resources are available to help start community garden projects.

Many land-grant colleges, universities, and community colleges offer useful courses and are a good source of technical assistance and energetic volunteers. College students looking for class projects, internships, or a subject for a master's thesis can be enlisted to help. Local environmental groups may also provide assistance, especially technical help, labor, and funding.

AmeriCorps Volunteers can be a source of help to jump start a project. Foundations, both local and national, may provide grants and loans. Generally, a nonprofit status or collaborative effort with another organization are an advantage in securing foundation funds.

American Community Gardening Association
The American Community Gardening Association manages a mentoring program to identify potential resources, assists with specific technical issues, and publishes *The Greening Review* and a biannual newsletter. The organization's primary efforts are aimed at supporting state and regional community garden groups, developing resources for gardens, and education.

100 North 20th Street, Fifth Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103–1495
Phone: (215) 988–8785
Web site: *www.communitygarden.org*

Common Ground Garden Program
Common Ground accepts donations for groups servicing the most needy and neglected urban areas.

Ricardo Gomez, Manager,
Agriculture & Environmental Programs
Burpee/USDA Partnership
USDA Extension Service
South Building, Room 3347
Washington, DC 20250–0900
Phone: (202) 720–2471

Community Development Block Grant Program
Community Development Block Grant program, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), distributes federal funds to local governments for a wide range of projects, including gardening and community beautification. Funds can be used to pay for planning, construction, and operating costs. Low- and moderate-income persons are targeted. Contact local government for information.

National 4-H Council
The National 4-H Council sponsors community tree planting grants.

Web site: *www.fourHcouncil.edu*

National Gardening Association
The National Gardening Association has a Web site with general gardening information. Members can access *Growing Ideas—A Journal on Garden-based Learning,* which contains useful articles on developing grade school gardening projects and provides practical ideas and instruction on urban gardening. The Web site includes an e-mail location for pen pals to exchange information and ideas.

Phone: (800) 863–5251
Web site: *www.garden.org*

Trust for Public Land
The Trust for Public Land operates an open space land conservation program and works in cooperation with community groups to gain control of land. It uses funds to purchase property or obtain options to purchase property, thereby preventing the loss of land to development. The trust then holds the property until local groups and/or government agencies purchase the property. A community garden project is an eligible use.

Trust for Public Land National Office
166 New Montgomery Street, Fourth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: (415) 495–4014
E-mail: info@tpl.org
Web site: *www.tpl.org*

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the national Web site at:

www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at:

Phone: (888) 312–2743
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Or write:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Neighborhood Networks
2277 Research Boulevard, 5J
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Neighborhood Networks Information

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at *www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org*, or contact the Neighborhood Networks information center toll-free at (888) 312–2743, or TTY at (800) 483–2209. The Web site contains valuable information for centers including:

HUD NN Coordinators
Neighborhood Networks Coordinators listing.

Center Database
Information about operational centers and those in planning. Neighborhood Networks Centers across the U.S. listed geographically by state.

Property Database
Information about Neighborhood Networks Properties listed geographically by state.

Resources Database
Information about funding, technical assistance, publications, and Web site resources.

News Database
Articles, press releases, success stories, and grand openings relevant to Neighborhood Networks.

List of Conferences
Training Calendar of Conferences and Training Events.

List of Resident Associations
Listing of Neighborhood Networks Properties with active Resident Associations.

Neighborhood Networks Consortia
List of Neighborhood Networks Consortia

Senior Properties
Listing of Senior Properties with Operational Neighborhood Networks Centers.

Online Networking
Talk with Neighborhood Networks staff and stakeholders via Online Networking.

- **Fact sheets.** Fact sheets are one-page summaries of various topics relevant to Neighborhood Networks centers. Fact Sheets that are currently available include information on health programs, partnerships, childcare, transportation, seniors, and community improvements at Neighborhood Networks centers.

- ***News Brief.*** (current and past issues): A quarterly newsletter that highlights national achievements for a wide audience including partners and the public.

- ***NNewsline.*** (current and past issues): A quarterly newsletter that highlights topics of interest to Neighborhood Networks centers and coordinators.

Endnote

[1] Graduate School of Library and Information Services, University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois (*http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~sewells/communitygardens.htm*).